

# Step One: Simple Beginnings

By Rawn Clark

I have chosen this title, “Simple Beginnings”, to emphasize that Step One is just the beginning and that it is simple. All too often a new student of initiation will read the Step One exercises and think that they are very complex and that completing them requires already advanced abilities, or that performing the exercises will require so much time each day that they will have no time left over for anything else, such as making a living and entertaining their friends, etc., etc., etc..

**None** of these assumptions are accurate.

According to his own words, Bardón arranged IHH as if it was “meant for the busiest man”, and even though Bardón’s way of phrasing things may seem somewhat archaic and oftentimes confusing to a modern reader, the exercises he is describing in Step One are rudimentary and the essence of simplicity, designed with the absolute beginner in mind. Furthermore, according to Bardón’s own instructions, they are each to be completed relatively quickly, within one to two weeks in most cases.

Yet there are many, many folks who have been stuck on the Step One exercises, making little or no forward progress, for quite literally, years at a stretch. Or who, after several years, are **still** trying to make enough time available in their daily lives to **begin** pursuing the exercises.

Over the years I’ve heard countless explanations for why folks are stuck in Step One or for why they still haven’t begun the work they claim to be so eager to begin, but there seem to be only two actual reasons underlying all those differing explanations. First and foremost is an incorrect understanding of the exercises and second is a subconscious resistance to self-transformation.

Misunderstandings can be corrected with the inclusion of additional information or simply with new ways of explaining things, but subconscious resistance is not so easily dealt with. All that I can do here is name it and explain it a bit. The actual elimination of subconscious resistance however can only be accomplished by the one experiencing it.

My primary goal with this lecture is to clarify the exercises of Step One so that you all might better understand their essential simplicity but before I begin discussing the exercises themselves, I must take a few moments to speak about the destructiveness of subconscious resistance, its impact upon IHH practice and some practical ways to address it.

One fairly universal characteristic of the subconscious aspect of human awareness is that it abhors change. It’s always doing its best to maintain the status quo, to keep things exactly as they are, familiar and, in the language of the psyche, “safe”. To the psyche, familiar equals safe and unfamiliar equals danger, so when confronted with an opportunity for intentional self-transformation, the psyche often reacts out of self-

preservation and erects whatever barriers to change it can create. When one's conscious intention is to transform the psyche then these barriers amount to self-sabotage. They are self-defeating in relation to the conscious intention but self-preserving in relation to the psyche's intention.

Most commonly these barriers manifest as an attitude of defeatism – “I can't do this”, “it's too hard”, “I'm not good enough”, “it will take forever”, “I don't have enough time in the day”, “I'm too tired”, etc. In other cases, they manifest in more concrete ways such as misplacing your copy of IIH; staying up too late at night so that in the morning you really are too tired to concentrate; experiencing sudden muscle cramps, pains or even headaches as soon as you sit down to meditate; and so on. They can even manifest as a certain fogginess of comprehension when reading the exercises from IIH, resulting in a complete or partial misunderstanding of things that you'd otherwise have comprehended in an instant!

The psyche is very subtle and at first, very powerful. However, the wonderful thing is that the conscious mind can over-ride and re-program the subconscious mind, so all is not lost! LOL

The best remedy for subconscious resistance is to truly decide to pursue the work of IIH, no matter what it takes. You must decide with all your power or force of will that absolutely nothing will prevent you from its pursuit. In the moment that you truly decide to do the work, the power which subconscious resistance wields over your conscious intention is greatly weakened, if not eliminated entirely. Any resistance that does remain is then easily dealt with through positive affirmations, simple bullheadedness and self-discipline.

The aforementioned manifestations of subconscious resistance all result in long delays in progress through the Step One exercises, but there is an even more pernicious manifestation that keeps many folks from even beginning the exercises. This is the almost pathological need to completely reshape one's life so that enough so called free time is liberated. Of course, one cannot really ever know how much time per day is actually needed to pursue the exercises until one is actually pursuing them, so this quest takes on the mythical proportions of a perpetually unreachable goal. Often the excuse of “I want to devote myself full time” is given to justify waiting, and while this might seem to be a noble goal, it actually represents an imbalanced approach to Hermetics.

The fact of the matter is that starting the exercises of IIH does not necessitate a complete restructuring of one's life. All that is required is a minor reshuffling of priorities. This results in enough time to devote to beginning the exercises. After that point, the benefits gained by pursuing the exercises will automatically change your perspective on how you use your time and awareness. Thus the practice integrates itself into your life, instead of you having to integrate your life into the vague concept of “practice”.

My advice to those stuck in this limbo-land of forever waiting for the right moment to get started, is to simply begin and do what you can do at the present time. Fit the practice

into the confines of your present life and let the practice transform your life. This is far, far better than never beginning at all or wasting years waiting to begin.

Okay, so enough about subconscious resistance. Let's move on now to the exercises themselves and examine exactly how simple they really are.

The reason I say that they are rudimentary and simple is because every exercise in Step One makes conscious and intentional use of completely natural processes and abilities. Ordinarily we use these abilities every day without thinking them in the least bit special or magical. What transforms them from the ordinary into the magical is the application of one's conscious intention.

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There are four distinct mental exercises in Step One. The very first exercise of the mental training is the simplest of all. Simply sit down, close your eyes and observe your mind. The only actual work required here is to accustom yourself to being an uninvolved observer of your own mind. Just watch and let whatever happens happen without getting involved in any way. Don't even judge what's happening and especially don't try to make anything happen. Just let it be whatever it's going to be and observe. Simple as that. No different really than watching a bird fly across the sky or a car drive past. You, the observer, are separate from what you observe.

One possible repercussion of detached observation of your own mind is that all those busy, relatively pointless thoughts that usually fill your mind might slow to a trickle. However, this must not be seen as a goal to be strived for. If it happens then so be it, but don't try to make your thoughts slow down. Just observe, without intervention.

Lack of intervention or involvement is what denotes passive observation and learning this skill of separating yourself from your own surface mind is the goal of the first exercise. It is so simple and rudimentary that after one week of practice you should easily be able to passively observe your mind for at least 10 minutes without once becoming involved in what you observe.

The second mental exercise is equally simple but only if you've mastered the first. This exercise is very similar to the Buddhist practice of "mindfulness" in which you simply keep your attention focused upon what you are physically doing in the present moment instead of involving yourself with the surface mind chatter. Since the subject of mind chatter is your emotional reaction to past events, thoughts, feelings, etc., involvement with your mind chatter naturally shifts your awareness away from what you are physically doing in the present moment. So in this exercise you are simply ignoring the mind chatter as you learned in the first exercise and now, instead of observing your mind, you are focusing your attention upon what you are physically doing.

The main difference here is that you are actively participating with your awareness instead of passively observing. However, since you are not devoting the major portion of

your awareness to your mind chatter, the quantity and indeed the quality of your attention focused upon the present moment will seem unusually sharp and powerful compared to “normal”.

Now it can take a lifetime to reach a consistent Zen-like state wherein you are always absolutely rooted in the present moment, but that is not, I repeat, not what is expected here in Step One. All that is required, in Bardón’s own words, is a “certain skill” in this exercise. This means that you must have become accustomed to actively participating with your awareness and be able to focus your attention where you want it and keep it there for several minutes at a time. That is the Step One goal for this exercise and this should take you a week or less of effort to achieve. Nonetheless, as Bardón stated, it is one of the exercises that should be practiced for the rest of your life and thus improved upon over time.

The third mental exercise is a natural extension of the second, namely the focusing of your attention upon a specific internal idea or train of thoughts instead of an external activity. This means that you turn your awareness inward once again and while ignoring the mind chatter, you focus all of your attention upon a pre-chosen idea. The only difference really between this exercise and the last is what your attention is focused upon. You are using and exercising the exact same ability, namely your ability to focus your attention where you want it and keep it there for, in this case, at least 10 minutes uninterrupted. Again, this should take no more than a week or two at the most to achieve.

Now, in this context of each successive exercise being an extension of what is learned from the previous exercise, the fourth mental exercise of Step One is equally simple. This is the fabled emptiness or vacancy of mind. Here, the attention is shifted completely away from its involvement with thoughts and thinking and is focused instead upon the peaceful silence that exists in the absence of thought.

You will by this point have experienced the fact that between the closing of one thought and the arrival of the next thought a deep silence is perceived. This empty silence is the focus of the fourth mental exercise. Of course the maintaining of this focus upon emptiness requires that you completely detach yourself from any thoughts that might arise within your mind, similar to the detachment you achieved in the first mental exercise, and also like in the first exercise, you must passively observe the emptiness without any expectation. Within two weeks you should have become so accustomed to focusing in upon this emptiness that you can maintain an empty mind for at least 10 minutes without interruption.

Like the second exercise of mindfulness, the emptiness of mind exercise must be pursued beyond Step One and deepened through continual practice. It is a very important state of awareness and Being in regard to initiation that must be cultivated with dedication. In fact, its continued deepening was assumed by Bardón in the exercises of all future Steps. In other words, if you don’t maintain its practice and go ever deeper into the internal silence, future exercises will be impossible to master. Nonetheless, all that is required in

Step One is that you be able to maintain your focus upon the emptiness to the exclusion of all else for at least 10 minutes.

At the very most, it should take no more than 6 weeks to master these four simple mental exercises to the required degree for Step One.

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The astral work of Step One is of equal simplicity and should be pursued with the same speed as the mental exercises. In other words, the whole should be finished within the same allotment of 4 to 6 weeks so that the mental and astral sections are finished at roughly the same moment.

Step One is basically a process of gaining a rudimentary self-knowledge through self-observation. With the mental exercises it's the mind and its functioning that is observed; while with the astral work, it's the personality or character that is observed and catalogued. The ability to distance oneself from the object of observation and the ability to focus one's attention by choice are the tools applied to observation and cataloguing of one's personality traits. Of course, these same abilities are what you are concurrently training through pursuit of the mental exercises, illustrating how the parts of each Step's coursework fit hand-in-glove.

The only thing accomplished in the astral work of Step One is a catalogue of your positive and negative character traits, nothing more. Step One astral work is not about self-transformation, nor is it really about self-judgment beyond that required to discern between a negative and a positive trait. You observe yourself with a bit of detachment and write down a list of the personality traits you perceive. Then you analyze your list and assign each trait to an Elemental influence; and finally, you sort these Elemental types into three degrees of strength depending upon how intensely they influence your behavior and thinking. This three-part process is done once, focused upon your negative character traits and once, focused upon your positive traits, resulting in what Bardson called your black and white "mirrors of the soul".

As you might imagine, the second mental exercise of mindfulness will frequently aid this process of self-observation as you try to discern, in real time, what character traits you are expressing in any given moment. And likewise, the third mental exercise of focusing your mind on a single idea or train of thoughts develops the exact same ability you will be using to analyze your list of traits and assign them to Elements and strengths. Ultimately, the different sections of each Step support each other by developing the same abilities in slightly different ways, thus insuring balanced growth of each ability.

In the Step One mental exercises the only tool used was your own awareness. And so with the astral work, your only tool is your awareness. This is an important concept so I will repeat that statement:

With the astral work, your only tool is your awareness.

I mean that literally. You are not to rely upon any body else's opinion, interpretation, reaction, teaching, attitude, etc. This is about you evaluating you based solely and exclusively upon how you feel about your self. This means throw away all those published lists of character traits, especially those written by Bardson in IIH, and simply observe how you feel about each aspect of your character. Not what you think about your traits, but what you feel in the immediate moment without thinking.

Remember, this is the astral work and as such it is rooted in, and focused upon, your emotions, so how you feel is the proper thing to observe and let inform you. Here, your emotions are the medium you are working with, just as your thoughts were the medium worked with in the mental exercises.

Fact is, only you know what is truly in your own heart and mind so only you can truly discern all of your negative and positive character traits with accuracy. If you turn to an external source for this information then you are looking in the wrong spot and you will not create an accurate soul mirror for yourself. The only place this information can be found is inside yourself, period.

There should be no delays in this process of self-cataloguing, no lingering over it for months on end without ever finishing. This sort of lingering and obsessing is a manifestation of subconscious self-sabotage which must be banished if you are to generate something useful. Just be serious about it and get it done, without delays and excuses. Making your first list of negative character traits should take no longer than two weeks at the most.

I recommend that you aim for at least 100 items in your list. It does not have to be "perfect". Perfection has no place in this process. The soul mirror you are creating is to be an organic, living, changing thing that will be your companion for the rest of your life, so let it evolve over time by not demanding that it be perfect at birth. LOL

Perfection, or at least the striving for perfection, also has no place in the subsequent process of assigning each item on your list to an Elemental influence. Just do the best you can by meditating briefly on each item and note which Element feels correct. Don't over-intellectualize this process either! You should spend no more than a few hours total on this, spread over no more than a few days. Remember, this mirror will be with you from now on so you can always correct errors that reveal themselves a day, a month or a year from now.

The final task of dividing the items within each Elemental category into three levels of importance should be given a bit more time and care. This division is actually more important, from a practical perspective, than the Elemental categorization since it will determine in Step Two which items you begin to transform first, etc. So take a week to carefully decide which character traits influence you the most and which the least. Again, this doesn't have to be perfect either, especially since these ratios will change once you begin the process of self-transformation in Step Two.

At the most, you will have spent 3 weeks and a couple of days on the creation of your negative soul mirror and once it's complete, you should immediately turn to working on your positive soul mirror. This mirror is just as important as your negative mirror. Without it you would not have a balanced image of yourself.

One might naturally think that assessing the positive aspects of one's personality would be an easy and pleasant experience and yet most folks seem to find it more difficult than creating their negative mirror! In part this is due to our cultural need for at least the imitation of modesty and also in part to the fact that most of us are taught that we are not good enough in one way or another and therefore have no noticeable redeeming qualities. This of course is hogwash. Each person possesses positive personality traits regardless of how poorly they think of themselves. So once again it's just a matter of getting to it and looking within yourself for the answers.

After three weeks at the most you should have completed your positive soul mirror, which brings the total time spent on the astral work to approximately six weeks. In other words, you finish the mental and astral work of Step One within the same time frame of 6 weeks.

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All that leaves to discuss now are the exercises of the physical section. These too are quite simple and are meant to introduce you to basic concepts that are elaborated upon in subsequent Steps.

Bardon began the physical section of Step One instructing the student to brush their skin and bathe in cold water first thing upon rising each morning and then follow this with a period of exercise. While these instructions seem quite specific and many attempt to follow them religiously, they are really meant to express a basic concept instead of prescribing a specific regimen. The idea is to do something that refreshes your physical body and eliminates any lingering tiredness before you begin working on your mental and astral exercises. This can take any form that suits you personally and does not necessarily have to involve brushing your skin and bathing in cold water. In other words, you need to create your own morning regimen, one that works best for your body and your life circumstances. If you design a regimen that truly works for you then it will be relatively easy to stick to it and develop it as a daily habit. Aside from the physical benefits, this practice will strengthen your will power and your ability to develop positive habits, both of which are important assets to initiation.

The next sections on the "mystery of breathing", the "conscious reception of food" and the "magic of water" are all rooted in a single, very simplistic principle and technique. The principle behind them is the fact that the Akasha, which is a natural part of all substance, attracts and captures thoughts and ideas, especially intentionally projected thoughts and ideas. So the technique simply takes advantage of this natural process by turning it into an intentional, conscious act.

Quite simply all one has to do is first formulate the idea one wishes to impregnate the air, food or water with, and then imagine that the Akasha of the substance has absorbed the chosen idea. This requires absolutely no physical exertion, nor really much in the way of mental exertion to accomplish. Many folks strain and grunt and act like they are trying to pound their idea into their air, food or water, but these are actually counterproductive practices. What is required is calmly focused thought and intention, which of course are abilities that the second and third mental exercises are meant to develop.

Bardon did not define any standards of “mastery” in regard to the physical exercises of Step One. What is required is that you develop a continuous practice or application of the basic technique. Through repeated application of the technique your ability to achieve your desired results will increase and this is what ultimately constitutes “mastery” of these rudimentary techniques.

Bardon also gave no time limits within which you must achieve success. Instead, he stated that the nature of the desire you impregnate your air, food and water with will in great part determine how long you will have to spend working in this way to achieve a noticeable result. This means that if no noticeable results have been generated by your work with the magic of air, food and water after six weeks, then you should not postpone moving on to Step Two once the astral and mental exercises have been mastered. In other words, don’t let a seemingly unfruitful practice of these techniques delay your progression from Step One to Step Two.

So that ends my description of how simple the work of Step One really is. Each exercise teaches a rudimentary technique or ability which can, and is designed to be, mastered relatively quickly. It is not a Step which one should spend months or years obsessing over.

Now I know that many folks who have spent the past several months or years working on Step One will be feeling a lot of mixed emotions upon hearing these words. Most folks in this situation that I’ve spoken to have expressed only the noblest of intentions and reasons for spending so much time and effort on Step One. And indeed, the attitudes of seriousness, sincerity and attention to detail are admirable and are in fact essential attributes for success with initiation in Hermetics, yet they still must be applied appropriately. Unfortunately, they become inappropriate when they prevent one from moving through the Step One work in a timely manner. So I say to anyone who has spent more than a couple of months on Step One -- let go of everything that is slowing you down, apply yourself to the exercises as I have outlined here and master them once and for all in a timely manner. Let them be as easy as they are instead of needing them to be unnecessarily difficult.

Thank you for listening! Now I will take your questions.

If you have a question, please right-click on one of the little domes sitting nearest you and select “touch”. This will place you in the queue and I will reply to your question in



turn. This way we won't lose track of who is asking what question when and hopefully, I'll actually get to all your questions this time. LOL